

PARROT & CO

HAROLD MACGRATH

Author of *The Carpet from Bagdad*,
The Place of Honeymoons, etc.

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SYNOPSIS.

Warrington, an American adventurer, and James, his servant, with a caged parrot, the trio known up and down the Irrawaddy as Parrot & Co., are bound for Rangoon to cash a draft for 200,000 rupees. Elsa Chetwood, rich American girl tourist, sees Warrington and asks the purser to introduce her. He tells her that Warrington has beaten a syndicate and sold his oil claims for £20,000. Warrington puts Rajah, the parrot, through his tricks for Elsa and they pass two golden days together on the river. Martha, Elsa's companion, warns her that there is gossip. In Rangoon Warrington banks his draft, pays old debts, and overhears and interferes in a row over cards, finds that the row is caused by an enemy, Newell Craig, and threatens to shoot him unless he leaves town. Elsa is annoyed by Craig and stabs him with a hatpin. Warrington bids Elsa good-by. Warrington discovers Elsa on the Singapore steamer and realizes his hopeless love and his duty to protect her against himself. Elsa tells him of her engagement. He avoids Elsa, who thinks he may be ill and makes inquiries, regardless of the misinterpretation of her concern. Craig is aboard, is warned by Warrington and calls him Paul, so letting him know that his chivalry and loyalty of ten years before have gone for nothing. Warrington refuses to avoid Elsa. Craig stirs up evil gossip. Elsa tells Warrington of the hatpin incident and he hunts up Craig, on murder bent, only to find him stretched out drunk on deck.

CHAPTER X—Continued.

Warrington turned the key, and a deluge of cold water struck Craig full in the chest. He tried to sit up, but was knocked flat. Then he rolled over on the deck, choking and sputtering. He crawled on his hands and knees until he reached the chair-rail, which he clutched desperately, drawing himself up. The pitiless stream never swerved. It smacked against the flat of his back like the impact of a hand.

"For God's sake stop it!" cried Craig, half strangled.

"Will you go below?"

"Yes, yes! Turn it away!" sober enough by now.

Warrington switched off the key, his face humorless, though there was a sparkle of grim humor in his sleep-hungry eyes. Craig leaned against the deckhouse, shaking and panting.

"I would I could get at your soul as easily." Warrington threw aside the hose, and the Lascars sprang upon it, not knowing what the big blond sahib might do next.

Craig turned, venom on his tongue. He spoke a phrase. In an instant, cold with fury, Warrington had him by the throat.

"You low base cur!" he said, shaking the man until he resembled a mink in on wires. "Had you been sober last night, I'd have thrown you into the sea. Honorless dog! You wrote to Miss Chetwood. You insulted her, too. If you wish to die, speak to her again."

Craig struggled fiercely to free himself. He wasn't sure, by the look of the other man's eyes, that he wasn't going to be killed then and there. There was something cave-mannish and cruel in the way Warrington worried the man, shaking him from side to side and forcing him along the deck. Suddenly he released his hold, adding a buffet on the side of the head that sent Craig reeling and sobbing into the companionway.

"Here, I say, what's the row?" Warrington looked over his shoulder. The call had come from the first officer.

"A case of drunkenness," coolly. "But I say, we can't have brawling on deck, sir. You ought to know that. If the man's conduct was out of order, you should have brought your complaint before the captain or me. We really can't have any rowing, sir."

Warrington replied gravely: "Expediency was quite necessary."

"What's this," The officer espied the soaked bedding. "Who turned the hose here?"

"I did," answered Warrington.

"I shall have to report that to the captain, sir. It's against the rules aboard this steamship for passengers to touch anything of that sort." The officer turned and began violently to abuse the bewildered Lascars.

Warrington entered the companionway; and a moment later he heard the water hiss along the deck. He was not in the least sorry for what he had done; still, he regretted the act. Craig was a beast, and there was no knowing what he might do or say. Still dressed, he flung himself in his bunk, and immediately fell into a heavy dreamless sleep that endured until luncheon.

Shortly after luncheon he was summoned to the captain's cabin. Warrington presented himself, mildly curious. The captain nodded to a stool.

"Sit down, Mr. Warrington. Will you have a choroot?"

"Yes, thanks."

A crackle of matches followed.

"This fellow Craig has complained about his treatment by you this morning. I fancy you were rather rough with him."

"Perhaps. He was very drunk and abusive, and he needed cold water more than anything else. I once knew the man."

"Ah! But it never pays to manhandle that particular brand of tippler. They always retaliate in some way."

"I suppose he has given you an excerpt from my history?"

"He says you cannot return to the States."

"I am returning on the very first boat I can find."

"Then he was lying?"

"Not entirely. I do not know what he has told you, and I really do not care. The fact is, Craig is a professional gambler, and I warned him not to try any of his tricks on board. It soured him."

"And knowing myself that he was a professional, I gave no weight to his accusations. Besides, it is none of my business. The worst scoundrel unhung has certain rights on my ship. If he behaves himself, that is sufficient for me. Now, what Craig told me doesn't matter; but it matters that I warned him. A word to anyone else, and I'll drop him at Penang tomorrow, to get out the best way he can. Ships passing there this time of year are generally full-up. Will you have a peg?"

"No, thanks. But I wish to say that it is very decent of you," Warrington rose.

"I have traveled too long not to recognize a man when I see him. Drop in any night after ten, if you care to."

"I shall be glad to accept your hospitality."

Outside, Warrington sought Elsa, and as they promenaded, lightly recounted the episode of the morning.

Elsa expressed her delight in laughter that was less hearty than malicious. How clearly she could see the picture! And then, the ever-recurring comparisons: Arthur would have gone by, Arthur would not have bothered himself, for he detested scenes and fist-cuffs. How few real men she had met, men who walked through life naturally, unfettered by those self-applied manacles called "What will people say?"

"Let us go up to the bow," she invited. "I myself have a little story to tell."

A school of porpoise were frolicking under the cutwater. Plop! plop! they went. Finally all save one sank gracefully out of sight. The laggard crisscrossed the cutwater a dozen times, just to show the watchers how extremely clever he was; and then, with a plop! that was louder than any previous one, he vanished into the deeps.

"I love these oriental seas," said Elsa, with her arms on the rail and her chin resting upon them. She wore no hat, and her hair shimmered in the sun and shivered in the wind.

"And yet they are the most treacherous of all seas. There's not a cloud in sight; in two hours from now we may be in the heart of a winter storm."

"I am grateful for that Mercy! Think of being shipwrecked on a desert island with the colonel and his three spinsters! Proprietaries, from morning until night. And the chattering tourists! Heaven forbid!"

"You had a story to tell me," he suggested. His heart was not within him. He wanted to sweep her up in his arms and hold her there forever. But the barrier of wasted opportunities stood between them.

"Oh, yes; I had almost forgotten." She stood up and felt for wandering strands of hair. "I find the world more amusing day by day. I ought to feel hurt, but I am only amused. I spoke to the colonel this morning, merely to say howdy-do. He stared me in the eye and deliberately turned his back to me."

"The doddering old—"

"There, there! It isn't worth getting angry about."

"But, don't you understand? It's all because of me. Simply because you have been kind to a poor devil, they start in to snub you, you! I'll go back to my old seat at the table. You mustn't walk with me any more."

"Don't be silly. If you return to your chair, if you no longer walk with me, they'll find a thousand things to talk about. Since I do not care, why should you?"

"Can't I make it clear to you?" desperately.

"I see with reasonable eyes, if that is what you mean. The people I know,

mine own people, understand Elsa Chetwood."

So her name was Elsa? He repeated it over and over in his mind.

She continued her exposition.

"There are but few, gently born. They are generous and broadminded. They could not be mine own people otherwise. They are all I care about. I shun mediocrity as I would the plague. I refuse to permit it to touch me, either with words or with deeds. The good opinion of those I love is dear to me; as for the rest of the world!" She snapped her fingers to illustrate how little she cared.

"I am a man under a cloud, to be avoided."

"Perhaps that cloud has a silver lining," with a gentle smile. "I do not believe you did anything wrong, premeditatedly. All of us, one time or another, surrender to wild impulse. Perhaps in the future there awaits for me such a moment. I cannot recollect the name of Warrington in a cause celebre," thoughtfully.

He could only gaze at her dumbly. "My name is not Warrington," finding his voice. God in heaven, what would happen when she found out what his name was? "But my first name is Paul."

"Paul. I have had my suspicions that your name was not Warrington. But tell me nothing more. What good would it do? I did not read that man's letter. I merely noted your name and his. You doubtless knew him somewhere in the past."

"Might there not be danger in your kindness to me?"

"In what way?"

"A man under a cloud is often reckless and desperate. There is always an invisible demon calling out to him: What's the use of being good? You are the first woman of your station who has treated me as a human being; I do not say as an equal. It's a heady wine for an abstemious man. Don't you realize that you are a beautiful woman?"

She looked up into his eyes quickly, but she saw nothing there indicating flattery, only a somber gravity.

"I should be silly to deny it. I know that had I been a frump, the colonel would not have snubbed me. I wonder why it is that in life beauty in a woman is always looked upon with suspicion?"

"Envy provokes that."

She resumed her inclination against the rail again. "After Singapore it is probable that we shall not meet again. I admit, in my world, I could not walk upon this free and easy ground. I should have to ask about your antecedents, what you have done, all about you, in fact. Then, we should sit in judgment."

"And condemn me, off-hand. That would be perfectly right."

"But I might be one of the dissenting judges."

"That is because you are one woman in a thousand."

"No; I simply have a mind of my own, and often prefer to be guided by it. I am not a sheep."

Silence. The lap-lap of the water, the long slow rise and fall, and the darting flying-fish apparently claimed their attention.

But Warrington saw nothing save the danger, the danger to himself and to her. At any moment he might fling his arms around her, without his having the power to resist. She called to him as nothing in the world had called before. But she trusted him, and because of this he resolutely throttled the recurring desires. She was right. He had scorned what she had termed as woman's instinct. She had read him with a degree of accuracy. In the eyes of God he was a good man, a dependable man; but he was not impossibly good. He was human enough to want her, human enough to appreciate the danger in which she stood of him.

"Tell me about the man who looks like me." His gaze roved out to sea, to the white islands of vapor low-lying in the east. "In what respect does he resemble me?"

"His hair is yellow, his eyes are blue, and he smiles the same way you do."

He felt the lump rise and swell in his throat.

"If you stood before a mirror you would see him. But there the resemblance ends."

"Is he a man who does things?" a note of strained curiosity in his tones. Ten years!

"In what way do you mean?"

"Does he work in the world, does he invent, build, finance?"

Mayhap her eyes deceived her, but the tan on his face seemed less brown than yellow.

"No; Mr. Ellison is a collector of paintings, of rugs, of rare books and china. He's a bit detached, as dreamers usually are. He has written a book of exquisite verses. . . . You are smiling," she broke off suddenly, her eyes filling with cold lights.

"A thousand pardons! The thought was going through my head how unlike we are indeed. I can hardly tell one master from another, all old books look alike to me, and the same with china. I know something about rugs; but I couldn't write a jingle if it was to save me from hanging."

"Do you invent, build, finance? A bit of a gulf had opened up between them. Elsa might not be prepared to marry Arthur, but she certainly would not tolerate a covert sneer in regard to his accomplishments."

Quietly and with dignity he answered: "I have built bridges in my time over which trains are passing at this moment. I have fought torrents, and floods, and hurricanes, and myself. I have done a man's work. I had a future, they said. But here I am, a subject of your pity."

She instantly relented. "But you are young. You can begin again."

"Not in the sense you mean."

"And yet, you tell me you are going back home."

"Like a thief in the night," bitterly.

CHAPTER XI.

The Blue Feather.

Elsa toyed with her emeralds, apparently searching for some flaw. Like a thief in the night was a phrase that rang unpleasantly in her ears. Her remarkable interest in the man was neither to be denied nor ignored. To receive the cut direct from a man whose pomposity and mental density had excited her wit and amusement, surprised her even if it did not hurt. It had rudely awakened her to the fact that her independence might be leading her into a labyrinth.

Something new had been born in her. All her life she had gone about calmly and aloofly, her head in the clouds, her feet on mountain tops. She had never done anything to arouse discussion in other women. Perhaps such a situation had never confronted her until lately. She had always looked forth upon life through the lenses of mild cynicism. So long as she was rich she might, with impunity, be as indiscreet as she pleased. Her money would plead forgiveness and toleration. Elsa shrugged. But shrugs do not dismiss problems. She could have laughed. To have come all this way to solve a riddle, only to find a second more confusing than the first!

Like a thief in the night. She did not care to know what he had done, not half so much as to learn what he had been. Speculations of some order; of this she was reasonably sure. So why seek for details, when these might be sorid?

Singapore would see the end, and she would become her normal self again.

She clasped the necklace around her lovely throat. She was dressing for dinner, really dressing. An implacable mood filled her with the irrefragable desire to shine in all her splendor tonight. Covertly she would watch the eyes of mediocrity widen. Hitherto they had seen her in the simple white of travel. Tonight they should behold the woman who had been notable among the beauties in Paris, Vienna, Rome, London; who had not married a duke simply because his title could not have added to the security of her position, socially or financially.

Into the little mirror above the wash stand she peered, with smiling and approving eyes. Never had she looked better. There was unusual color in her cheeks and the clarity of her eyes spoke illuminatingly of superb health. The tan on her face was not made noticeable in contrast by her shoulders and arms, old ivory in tint and as smooth and glossy as ancient Carrara.

"You lovely creature!" murmured Martha, touching an arm with her lips. "You are foolish to dress like this."

She finished the hooking of Elsa's waist.

"And why?"

"In the first place there's nobody worth the trouble; and nobody but a duchess or a . . ." Martha paused embarrassedly.

"Or a what? An improper person?" Elsa laughed. "My dear Martha, your comparisons are faulty. I know but two duchesses in this wide world who are not dowdies, and one of them is an American. An improper person is generally the most proper, outside her peculiar environments. Can't you suggest something else?"

Martha searched but found no suitable reply. She believed that she saw more clearly into the future than Elsa. Someone would talk, and in that strange inscrutable fashion scandal has of reaching the ends of the earth, the story would eventually arrive home; and there, for all the professions of friendship, it would find admittance. No door is latched when scandal knocks. Martha readily appreciated that it was all harmless, to be expressed by a single word, whim. But Martha herself never acted upon impulse; she first questioned what the world would say. So run the sheep.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Many "Kings of Jerusalem."

The proposals to revive the kingdom of Jerusalem are a reminder that no less than five European monarchs claim to be monarch of the holy city. The most valid claim at present is that of the sultan of Turkey, but "king of Jerusalem" figures among the titles of the king of Spain, the ex-king of Portugal, the king of Italy and the emperor of Austria.

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The Telephone.

Many a woman housed by a cold amuses herself and attends to necessary business over the telephone. But when all the rest of the family come down with like colds she wonders how they caught it, because she has "not kissed anybody."

Nobody thinks of the mouthpiece of the telephone, and yet where is there a more convenient harbor than that for germs breathed into it from throat and nose?

The average household does not even think of dusting out the transmitter and it is cleaned only upon the occasional visits of the repair man from the telephone company. As a matter of fact, it should be washed out frequently with a disinfectant. Even the earpiece is benefited by an occasional "wipe," as it rests against the hair and ear of everybody in the house, to say nothing of visiting workmen who want to call up headquarters.

Sidestepping a Theological Query.

"When dat uppity cullid man tried to stahst a 'spite wild me," stated old Brother Cuddyhump, "by axin', if de world is round, like some folks say 'tis, why de doose don't de people on de yudder side drop off, I says to him, 'Putt it in writin', sah; dess putt it in writin', and I'll consider yo' distention.' And dat sho' took de gas out'n his b'loom! Uck—dat ignunt nigger kain't write, and I kain't read, if he could. If he could write and I could read I wouldn't uh-instigated him to put it in writin', uh-ka-ze I don't know de answer no mo' dan he does!"

It's no credit to a man to keep his word because no one will take it.

Time and tide wait for no man, but undertakers are more obliging.